

Can Business Save the Earth? Innovating Our Way to Sustainability

Michael Lenox

Aaron Chatterji

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There is bad news and good news about the state of the earth, and business school professors Michael Lenox and Aaron Chatterji address both with eye-opening accuracy in this compelling, provocative treatise.

The bad news, of course, is “the existential threat posed by a changing climate and environmental ‘unsustainability,’” write the authors. The good news, however, is that they believe businesses—working in concert with the government, educational institutions, and nongovernmental organizations—can come to the rescue.

In a lucid, well-constructed argument, Lenox and Chatterji lay out “a model of innovation” that elegantly brings together many individuals and institutions, participating collaboratively to move products and services “from research to development to commercialization to scaling and diffusion.” After a description of the system, the book ponders how each of four different kinds of individuals—innovator, manager, investor, and customer—will contribute to this system.

Organizing the book in this way enables one to both understand and identify with these individuals and the roles they play. In discussing the manager’s role, for example, the authors point out that “green business can be good business,” citing examples and studies to back up this argument. The chapter concerning the customer may be the most sobering. Here, the authors write, “Business cannot save the Earth without consumers choosing sustainable goods and services from available alternatives.”

A final chapter in the book reiterates and expands upon the roles of the players, demonstrating the interactions required among all of them. The authors make an impassioned plea, particularly to businesses, to bring to market the innovative products and services necessary to create value while reducing environmental impacts. While the tenor of *Can Business Save the Earth?* is generally positive, one cannot miss the real sense of urgency it conveys.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (July/August 2018)

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